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HEADLINE: 45th District race draws crowded field; 3 challengers seek Senate seat held by McFadden since '94; CAMPAIGN 1998

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BODY:

Among the city's eight state legislative districts, East Baltimore's 45th is unique in at least one respect in this year's primary election.

In all the other districts, more candidates are running for the House than the Senate.

But in the 45th, as many candidates -- four -- are seeking election to the sole Senate slot as to the three House seats.

The three challengers to incumbent state Sen. Nathaniel J. McFadden, two of whom worked to get him elected in 1994, say the situation symbolizes the dissatisfaction with McFadden and his Eastside Democratic Organization, which includes the incumbent House members.

"The fact that there are three challengers indicates that there is vulnerability there," said Aaron Keith Wilkes, one of the trio seeking the seat. "I sense the disenchantment."

But McFadden said the surfeit of Senate contenders reflects the political ambitions of those running against him. He said he and his colleagues have done a good job.

"These are individuals who have political aspirations," McFadden said of his challengers. "We have a history of delivering."

The eight candidates for Senate and House are all Democrats. The 45th is one of five city districts in which no Republicans are on the ballot for either chamber.

All of the candidates say much needs to be done in the district.

Encompassing a large chunk of East Baltimore, the 45th includes the Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions and Clifton Park. A portion of the district is in one of the city's three noncontiguous federally designated Empowerment Zones, designed to reverse decades of urban decline.

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The district has been dominated for decades by the EDO, the political organization of McFadden and Dels. Talmadge Branch, Clarence Davis and Hattie N. Harrison.

If history is any guide, that dominance will be difficult to overcome.

Four years ago, McFadden trounced then-City Councilman Carl Stokes in a race for the seat being vacated by retiring state Sen. Nathan C. Irby Jr.

In contrast to Stokes, a popular politician who had ousted McFadden from his City Council seat in 1987, those running against McFadden this year are virtual political novices.

Wilkes, 31, an investment firm executive, unsuccessfully sought a position on the Democratic State Central Committee in 1986. Bernard L. Peters, 59, a retired AT&T inspector, failed to win a seat for City Council in 1979 and state Senate in 1990. Riker McKenzie, 50, is making his first run for office. He is a longshoreman known for running Riker (Rocky) McKenzie Human Development Center Inc., which buys abandoned buildings and hires unemployed youths to refurbish them.

In the 45th's House race, the challenger to the three incumbents is making a second try for a House seat. In 1994, Doris Minor-Terrell, 54, who runs a special education program at Lake Clifton High School, finished last among nine candidates.

But while they may lack expertise, the challengers have no shortage of sharp-tongued critiques.

Peters complains about lack of responsiveness to constituent concerns by McFadden and the delegates. "Communication is the biggest problem," he said.

McKenzie, who with Wilkes supported McFadden and the three delegates in 1994, said problems with crime, housing and unemployment in the district have "gotten worse" since then.

Wilkes said he has become "disillusioned" with McFadden, charging that he has "only empowered those people within his political organization."

He has teamed with Minor-Terrell to form a ticket called the 45th People's Team with the slogan "A team committed to you -- not special interests."

Minor-Terrell, who heads Rutland-Lafayette Community Association, was one of two community activists who filed a complaint in December with the General Assembly's ethics committee against McFadden and Harrison.

The complaint charged that the two lawmakers had acted improperly in pushing through more than \$ 1 million in subsidies to Fair Chance Center, a job training and referral center run by Marie Washington, their political strategist.

In July, the ethics committee concluded that McFadden and Harrison did not violate state law because they did not benefit personally from from state aid.

Minor-Terrell said the committee opinion doesn't end the matter.

McFadden and Harrison say the matter is closed as far as they -- and most of their constituents -- are concerned. "It's a nonissue," said Harrison, 70, who has served in the House since 1973.

They say the aid to Fair Chance Center is one of a number of community projects they have supported. Community groups that have been helped range from Clergy United for the Renewal of East Baltimore to St. Frances Academy.

McFadden, 52, said being selected by his colleagues to chair the city's Senate delegation shows he's doing a good

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job. "I think my colleagues saw I worked hard and rewarded me for that," he said.

Davis, 55, said not everything he's accomplished in Annapolis is readily apparent. During the past four years the four-term delegate said he has used his position as a member of the Ways and Means Committee to help ensure that the city received as much financial support from the state as possible.

Branch, a member of the Appropriations Committee, noted one of his accomplishments is increased funding for a state program to provide assistance to moderate-income residents who have the virus that causes AIDS.

Like McFadden, Branch, 42, is seeking a second term in the legislature. He acknowledges that campaigning is different as an incumbent. "You take a little more heat," he said.

District 45

Candidates: Democrats for Senate are incumbent Nathaniel J. McFadden, and challengers Riker Mckenzie, Bernard L. Peters and Aaron Keith Wilkes. Democrats for three House seats are incumbents Talmadge Branch, Clarence Davis and Hattie N. Harrison and challenger Doris Minor-Terrell. There are no Republican primaries for the House or Senate.

Data: 1994 primary turnout: 29 percent of Democrats and 24 percent of Republicans, Term: Four years.

The district: The 45th covers much of East Baltimore, from the Belair Rd. corridor to Gardenville.

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GRAPHIC: PHOTO, SUN STAFF, Incumbent: Sen. Nathaniel J. McFadden has three challengers for the 45th District seat.

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